REBUTTAL
SHOWDOWN
A DANGONRONPA FANZINE

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DCRP

MUKOP
IKUSAB

GAME OVER

BLOODLINE

Mystxmomo

Mukuro is twelve when she disappears off the face of the earth.

“Despair sisters,” Junko spits and seethes as she burns away pictures from their childhood. It’s painful to watch the memories burn. Literally so, letting the flames lick at her fingers as they eat away at photo after photo, take away the physical memories she deems dear.

(But there’s something undeniably cathartic about it. Calling to her, with an intricate and overwhelming siren’s song. She feels it, more strongly than she’s ever felt anything in her life.

It’s despair, true to its core. She knows deep in her heart, that this is how she was made to feel.)

She gets picked up by a modeling agency that same year. Something about her pretty face, a natural ability to turn eyes and cast a smile that always seems just a tad bit too sincere. They love her for it. She’s young, gorgeous, and genuine. Fashion is easy. It’s hedonistic, and absolutely luxurious. It’s a stark contrast to the lifestyle she grew up with.

It’s hideous. All of it. She quickly learns how the stares of strangers feel on her skin. She learns how overwhelming keeping an image can be, how to sacrifice so that she can gain. She learns what it’s like to lie through her teeth to pretty interviewers that ask the same questions and want the same answers.

She wants to watch them all burn...

Hope’s Peak is just another accessory to that. Another card in her hand. She doesn’t need it, necessarily speaking. With the connections she’s built, she could easily wait a few years. Whisper into the right ear, smile at the right people. She doesn’t *need* Hope's Peak. But if the fashion industry has taught her anything, it’s that a grand event is nothing without its presentation. And what better picture is there, than for the country’s hope to play stage to the world’s destruction.

She finds irony in it, at least.

Getting herself in is child's play. Getting her sister in is somehow even easier.

Mukuro has a tattoo on her hand in faded black ink. It's not with pride that she wears it, but solemn duty.

"This is the ugliest shit I've seen in years. You willingly got this?" Junko asks, the first time she returns home. It's like, some ungodly hour in the morning, and Mukuro had called her phone out of absolutely nowhere. She doesn't even know how she'd gotten her number. Junko had almost left her here. It hurts, she thinks, to see her again. But that was good. The ache in her heart fueled something in her.

"Ah- Well. Not really..." Mukuro mumbles, goes to pull her hand back. Junko yanks it harder towards herself, forces her sleeve up with the scratch of her nails. It leaves light red welts in its wake, but if Mukuro has anything to say on the matter, she does not. Doesn't even wince at the feeling.

"Oh my god! You don't even have like- a scar! What were you *doing* out there?"

"I'm... I'm good at what I do, Junko." It's the firmest tone Mukuro has taken with her. It almost startles her. Mukuro isn't looking at her when she speaks, seems to prefer burning holes into the ground instead, "I'm good at what I do. I want to prove that to you."

Because Mukuro feels guilty for leaving her. Junko knows that she does. The first thing she did when she got off the plane was whisper an apology into her shoulder, tense and uncertain. But Junko has already been burnt. She's already licked her wounds and tasted blood, and she wants more.

"Well," Junko drops her hand, and steps back. There's a smile on her face, but it's cold and particularly unkind. Junko will never forgive her for leaving. Mukuro doesn't need to know that, "Let's see where your loyalties lie, then."

She doesn't actually expect to like her class.

She shouldn't. They're embarrassing, all of them.

Rumor goes that there were short pickings this year. The sort of garbage bin

talent you find rotting at the base of a trash can. They're all a little too polite, a little too chummy, a little too oblivious to the world around them.

But she finds something akin to fondness blossoming, stirring something painful up in her chest. She doesn't mean to be close to any of them. Expects to place the same sort of smile that's too sincere, expects to need to laugh a little too loud. Expects to need to play her part and play it well.

But there's no part to play. She fits in like another piece of the puzzle. They both do. It's comfortable. Her heart twists at the thought of hurting any of them, because they've become something important to her.

She thrives on that.

Mukuro notices. Observant bitch.

"You like them too, don't you?" Mukuro asks, quietly. They're sitting off to the side of the track, watching as Makoto struggles to catch up to Sakura and Aoi, or Leon struggles into a stretch, or Mondo attempts (key word attempt) to coach Chihiro into moving faster. It's comfortable. Too comfortable.

"Ugh. Disgusting. Don't ask me that," Junko scoffs, kicks Mukuro with her heel.

"But..."

"Of course I like them," she rolls her eyes at Mukuro. "Have you seen them? They're absolutely pathetic. Like a whole group of kicked puppies. You can't help but feel bad for 'em."

"...Have you considered," Mukuro hesitates. "Not- Not... You know. The plan-" She stumbles over herself, as though acknowledging their plan is still too much for her. Toko passes a little too close by for her comfort. Junko snaps forward to wrap her arm around Mukuro's neck, startling her back into the grass.

"Oh my *god*, I've told you! Don't talk about stuff like *that* at school," she practically screeches it, as she reaches over to grab her sister's hair and yank. This gets them a few stares, an awkward smile from Aoi, which is all good because Mukuro immediately flusters under the sudden attention.

And then no one is looking at them anymore.

She leans in close to Mukuro, "You still don't understand. I want to love them like I love you. I want to help them rise up. I want them to overcome the world

crumbling around them, for everyone to know how great they are. I want them to be the center of it all, Mukuro."

She blinks. Pulls back, "Then I want to watch them fall. I want them to know the bitter, disgusting taste of failure. We'll watch them fall. Together. I'll show you the appeal of despair. Give you the same gift you gave me."

Makoto Naegi is a nobody.

Literally a nobody. Got into Hope's Peak by luck alone. He's the sort of kid raised in a pretty little perfect family and took all those lessons on being kind-hearted a little too seriously. He's the sort that sees the best in everyone, would throw himself in front of a train for a serial killer if it meant keeping them alive.

Mukuro is, naturally, enamoured with him.

Why wouldn't she be? He's everything she's never had. Comfortable. Easy to get along with. Mukuro doesn't tell her this, and Junko doesn't ask directly. But she doesn't need to, to be able to tell. Besides, Mukuro has always been a hopeless romantic sort, under all those guns and knives. Used to hang boy band posters in their bedroom, until Junko spent the time pulling each one down and ripping through them.

It's disgusting, really.

"You're disgusting, really," she tells Mukuro, gaze burning into her side.

"Huh?" Mukuro looks a little too hurt, for such a small remark. Junko's lips twitch up, satisfied.

Makoto needs to get his two cents in. Naturally.

"You should really be kinder to her..." Makoto tells her, watches them. The scolding is playful, but it's sincere. He's gotten on her case before. About how she treats her own sister. He's *genuinely* concerned about Mukuro's feelings. Concerned Junko is 'taking it a little too far.'

It burns Junko up.

"And let her get away with this... Fashion crime? Right. Spare me," she snaps. Mukuro shrinks in on herself.

She considers, for a moment, getting rid of him.

Ordering Mukuro to off him. Not because she doesn't like Makoto. He's kind, he's clever, he's full of such nauseating *hope*. She just can't plan around Makoto Naegi. How much easier would it be to get rid of the one that lacks predictability. How much despair would Mukuro feel, watching Makoto choke on his own blood. Would it be enough to satisfy her?

Maybe.

But she stalls.

Makoto could put a stop to her plans. She sees that potential in him, clear as day. Sees the way he brings their class together. And it would be wrong to get rid of that wildcard. Makoto isn't a factor to be rid of. He's a challenge to overcome. Something to be crushed and pulled under like the rest of them. If her plan is good enough, then it can overcome Makoto.

And if it isn't?

Well.

Everyone loves a good plot twist.

Izuru Kamukura is everything she could have asked for and more.

The Kamukura Project. Hope's Peak's most ambitious project to date. Artificial hope wrapped up in a fleshy, human package. Years of research into talent dumped into some lame reserve chump the first year the program starts up.

On one hand, it's too ridiculous to be true. An urban legend whispered around during bathroom gossip. On the other hand, only Hope's Peak is so over-confident, so daring as to try. Of course she believes it. Of course she believes that she's lucky enough to have exactly what she needs, just within her reach. Just out of hiding, at the base of the school building.

She finds him tucked in a little room in the old school building. Only a bed, and the cracked concrete floors. Long hair, blistering red eyes, a stare that looks through her. Understands her, in a way no one else has before. She feels known in his gaze, and she knows that he has to feel the same. He understands what it's like to have apathy turn you into something greater.

He knows what it's like to crave something more. He knows the boredom that

comes with predictability. She appeals this to him, smile on her face, sincere when she assures him that;

“I can give you so much more.”

(Kind of a plain face though. Not what she expected from the Ultimate Hope, but nothing she can’t work with.)

Mukuro and her don’t look alike.

Not exactly. Never have. There’s some more obvious features, like Mukuro’s hair and eyes. More subtle features, easier to miss. Mukuro has freckles, ugly-ass calluses on her hands and feet from years in the fields. It’s only worsened, as they’ve gotten older. Junko’s been bleaching her hair since she was 14, Mukuro’s gotten more muscle despite her otherwise small stature. Junko keeps her nails well manicured and tamed, and Mukuro hasn’t willingly touched nail polish once in her life. Junko has a presence, Mukuro disappears in a crowd.

On top of that, Mukuro’s tits are smaller.

“I kind of won in that department,” Junko tells her, over the sound of rioting reserve course, propping her legs up on the nearest desk. “I don’t really think it will matter much though. You know, with the whole memory erasure.” She doesn’t need to remind Mukuro of this aspect of their plan, but there’s always a flash of guilt that Mukuro is never really unable to hide whenever she bothers to bring it up.

That flash of guilt has always been something special.

Murder Cases of
Genocide Jack
TOP SECRET

2

CELESTIAL

Saa

She was lucky to be born, they had said.

But that was only the beginning, because Celestia Ludenberg was a girl blessed by Lady Luck and destined for greater things than this simple town nestled in the heart of the plains. Beyond the gilded pages of the tattered novels clutched in her hands, the life she deserved beckoned to the resentment that shrouded her heart. She dreamt of eighteenth century lavish castles with marble floors and embroidered silk made with threads spun from gold and liquid starlight. God's first and only mistake was to leave her here in the wrong place, in the wrong era, in a second-rate family in a third-rate house.

But she could work with that. She was born lucky, after all.

The first time she gambled, she wagered away her life without a second thought. She didn't have a penny to her name, betting away everything she had on beginner's luck and a chilly, disarming smile like she'd read about in the books. Her winnings were worth more than her own weight in gold, and the heady flavour of victory as an aftertaste never really quite left her tongue.

She returned home with everything she ever wanted, and returned to nothing at all.

They couldn't have known where she lived, as she stared dully at the ransacked living room, couch askew and splintered wood and shards of glass from what remained of the front door scattered along the floor. There was blood smeared against the walls. She dropped the purse that held her winnings with a sickening thud, a sharp metallic ring that echoed down the empty hallways and through the ghost of the place she once called home.

A tiny, faraway tinkle of a bell sounded in her ears, snapping her out of her daze as Grand Bois Chéri appeared around the corner, padding daintily through the wreckage with his nose in the air. He meowed at her as she crumpled to her

knees in visible relief, purring when she reached out a shaky hand to press against the soft fur of his side. At least he was well. If they'd so much as laid a finger on her cat, she'd skin them *alive*. She'd tear them apart. But this was okay. Everything was okay.

It wasn't like she ever really considered that second-rate family *home*, anyway. She could work with this.

Mere moments after she stepped out of the house, the building went up in flames behind her, burning away every trace of her second-rate life as the third-rate house came crumbling down in a blaze of fire and smoke. And just as well, she thought without looking back once, because she was never returning to this disgraceful place.

(Good riddance.)

"Taeko, my dear grandchild," her grandfather had said to her once, and the way the commoner's name rolled off his tongue made her lip curl in disgust. "As long as you live your life well, you will surely find happiness that no amount of wealth can buy."

It was a quote that stuck with her, despite everything, because of how utterly *wrong* it was. It came from a place of compliance, of blind obedience, of everything ordinary that she despised and wished to bury beneath her. But in the end, it was an inconsequential moment from her inconsequential childhood, a memory that would fade by the next time she tasted victory on her lips. She'd forget what they stole from her once she took back everything and trampled upon those who wronged her. She'd build her castle upon their burnt remains.

Revenge out of duty, not out of pain. Where it hurt, she'd already long forgotten.

And that was how Celestia Ludenberg rewrote herself a far more fitting tale of luxury and grandeur, gilded with the passages of her favourite books and paved with gold. Gambling had always been a thrilling game of wits tangled in a web of lies. As the lies came naturally, she fit right in and carried herself dutifully into a den of danger to emerge undefeated every time.

Cheating? She played her cards right, and those who went up against her played right into her hands like foolish moths to the mere dream of a flame. There was no right or wrong in a game of lies, no truth in a limbo of parasitic symbiosis between greedy people starving for power and coin. This was a world that ran

on luck as fuel, and it was simply captivating for one such as her born with luck racing through her veins like adrenaline.

Life was as exhilarating as it was in the books if she could bend it to her whims.

Where the lies began and where the truth ended, she could never be sure anymore. As the Queen of Liars, that was certainly befitting of her status, shrouding her identity in an air of mystery. She sat at the winner's table in solitary victory until she no longer remembered what it meant to be ordinary.

Celestia Ludenberg, after all, was born extraordinary, and born to win.

It was only natural that Hope's Peak Academy scouted her, she thought, even though she could hardly contain her excitement for the opportunity to experience school life like a normal high schooler –

This was a one-time thing, she told herself sternly. Celestia's time was far too valuable to waste away in some rotting, decrepit building full of side characters in which the only thing she had in common with them was that they all happened to have been born in the same year. The fact that all the students were supposedly at the top of their field made the prospect a little more tolerable, like a school that pitted brilliant minds against each other in the ultimate gamble. It turned out things were different than she'd envisioned, however, and that the school expected her to socialize and fraternize with the commoners.

She was scandalized.

A semester flew by. The irony of it all was that school was simply... fun. She'd never admit it openly to their faces though, because her classmates were still worthless imbeciles even as they amused her greatly with their antics. But doing imbecile things once in a while, it made her feel like she was experiencing the childhood she'd lost. Perhaps, she thought, that was what it meant to be fortunate.

And slowly, slowly, Taeko Yasuhiro found a place in this world again.

The gap in her memories here, she no longer remembered if she'd forgotten it on purpose.

When Monokuma announced the mutual killing game, Celestia knew it was made for her, just as she was born for something like this. This was the ultimate gamble, the thrill she'd been seeking, the final game with her life on the line like the first and only taste of danger from all those years ago. She weighed her life against their deaths, those quirky, disposable side characters that she couldn't care less about who gave her story flavour. She was the protagonist. There was no way she could lose, and if she truly had to fall here, then she'd have crafted the most delightful tale.

In the face of death and with the stench of fear hanging in the air, even the weak were driven into a corner in a desperate bid to save themselves. A life for a life, with no way out but to drag yourself down into hell with your victim like an inexperienced killer. Abhorrent, the lot of them, with no respect for the thrill of the game. She refused to play with such imbeciles, and remained impassive as their numbers dwindled and her own fate inched closer to theirs with each passing chapter of her life.

But then Monokuma appealed to greed.

Surely no one, the remaining survivors reasoned with a visible sigh of relief, would take a life merely for such a sum of money. There was no less noble a cause to justify a murder.

There was nothing to justify. This was what Celestia was familiar with, simply a gamble with her life on the line and the world dancing at her fingertips. She wrote and rewrote a tale from the novels she loved so much, pasting together the scattered pages of her beloved stories for the biggest gamble of them all, ink against gold against the steady thrumming of her heart. She'd use her entire arsenal of lies and wits and everything she had to offer, every scrap, every drop, every word. Theatrics. Bribery and blackmail. An accomplice to keep her bloodied hands a smidge cleaner. She'd immortalize herself in a fantastic tale of glory and if her magnum opus was not enough to grant her a sequel, at least this would make for a stunning epilogue.

That was what Celestia told herself as she stepped into the trial that would determine the course of fate for her, pitting luck against wit against her dreams for the first time in years. It should've been thrilling, but all she could feel was the strangest, most inexplicable sensation of regret; a sorrowful lament from Taeko Yasuhiro herself.

Charred ash coated her tongue like sandpaper, as her lungs burned with each weakening breath. Her eyes stung and her skin blistered and she struggled

uselessly in her restraints as the wall of flames crackled around her. Acrid smoke scorched her vision and settled in her throat, and she knew she'd likely die from that first like she'd read about in the books, instead of the defiant honour of being burned alive.

Celestia Ludenberg laughed in the face of death. She died as she lived, prideful and elegant with her head held high as she perished with grace. And what was left was Taeko, a scared little girl from a simple town that desperately wished to live or to be consumed by the raging fire sooner and yet could not be granted either of those things. For the first time in her life, her luck had completely run dry.

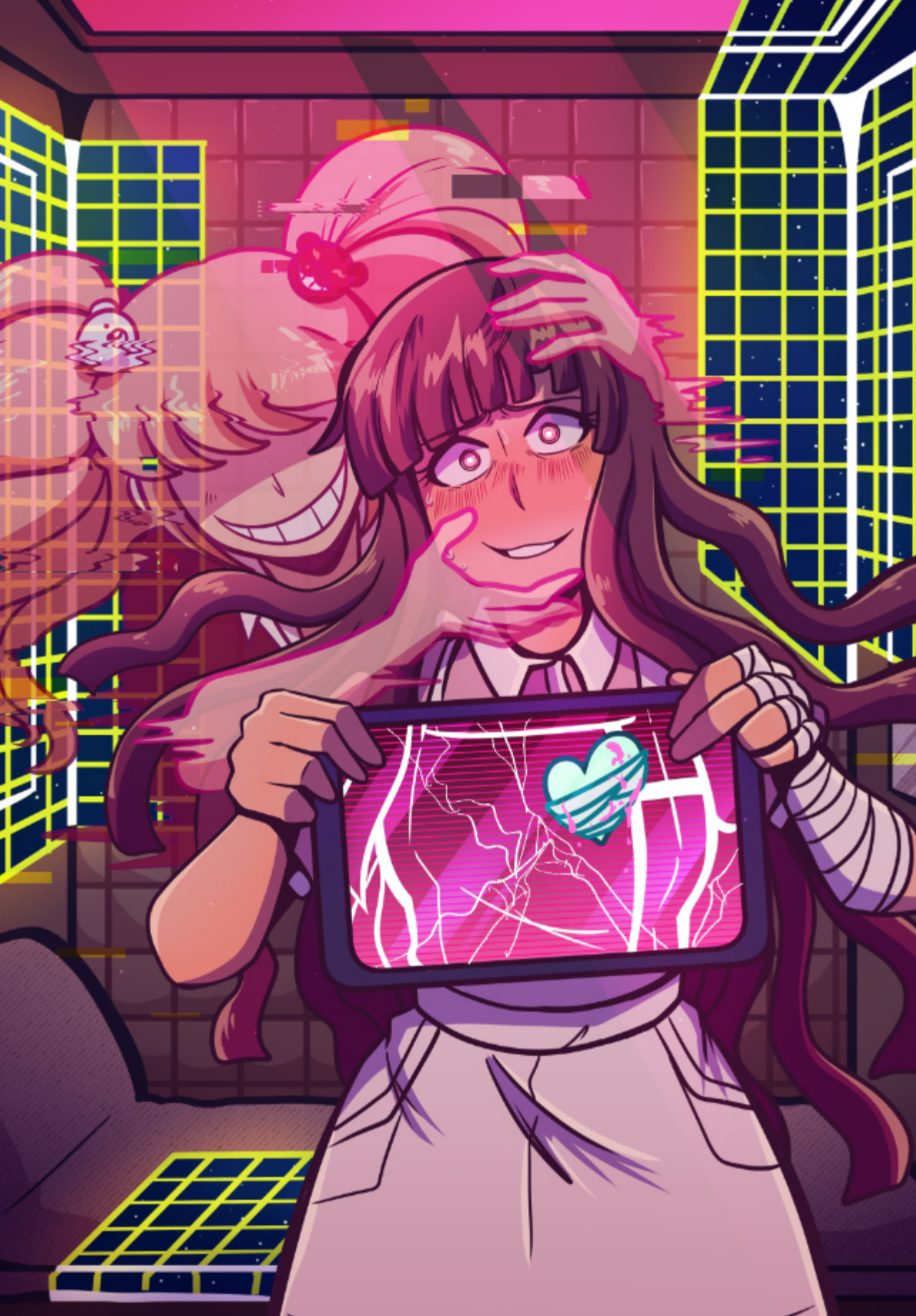
She could hear the distant ringing of a cat's bell and she was certain it was an auditory hallucination of sorts, and not Grand Bois Chéri coming to take her to the gates of hell. She could see her house burning in her mind's eye, and she wondered why she didn't shed tears back then. Wrapped up in the dignified, aloof image she'd tried to imitate, there had been no room for Taeko's grief.

There was no room now, either. Everything was numb, and her senses shut off one at a time. For the first time, she wondered what it would have been like if she'd been satisfied with just being ordinary, living out her life like a side character in someone else's story. If she'd left the gilded pages to a far more suitable protagonist, maybe things wouldn't have turned out like this.

But a normal life would have never been enough to satiate her. In her final moments, she cursed fate, as she had merely been left in the wrong place, the wrong era, the wrong lifetime.

So was she really lucky to have been born at all?

GET
WELL
SOON
WANTED
MAKOTO NAEGI



Bye-Bye
chies!

DESPAIRING FOR HOPE

Sugamint

Nagito Komaeda knows his role incredibly well.

For a good thing to happen, a bad thing must precede it, and vice versa. If he feels joy, he knows it will soon follow with misery, and if he suffers, happiness will be given to reward him. His luck cycle follows this easy rule, one he's learned across the years to gently steer and manipulate.

It *does* catch him unaware every now and then, as fate is a fickle, *fickle* thing that refuses to be tampered at times... but it will not shock his world any longer, not like it did when he was a child. Not like it did when he lost his parents to a plane crash and gained freedom and a hefty inheritance, not like it did when he was kidnapped by a murderer and then won the lottery.

Komaeda has learned from the past decade of living with this curse... this *blessing* which afflicts him and influences every aspect of his life. He is no longer surprised by anything that happens, knowing the cycle is inevitable. And, if it is inevitable, there is no reason to fight it. There's no point. There's no winning against it. What he does instead, is wield it — as his shield, as his weapon, as his reason for being of any worth.

He knows, in the grand scheme of things, he is but a cog in the machine, not worthy of standing alongside all these Ultimates — these wonderful, talented individuals who would bring the world to greater heights. They will be the ones who can change the world, while Komaeda is stuck with all these rules.

However, even if Komaeda can't stand with them... he can still help them shine brighter. In every good story, the heroes have to overcome trials and tribulations by defeating enemies, overcoming hardships and destroying all obstacles standing in their way. And that's just the thing — for the sake of peace and happiness, there must first be conflict and pain. There has to be a **despair**-inducing antagonist who provides the motivation to make the protagonists rally together and become stronger.

Komaeda knows this to be his role.

It's a lonely role.

But he's proud to play it.

He's proud of *them*. When he provides them with a common enemy, they join hands, synthesizing their *spectacular* talents to fight against him. Despite his loneliness at being singled out, he had been exhilarated when he watched them join forces during the investigations and class trials. Joy overwhelmed his heart as he watched them shine with their talent. The Ultimates working together... how wonderful! He is blamed and hated and he is *happy* — he knows as long as he continues to suffer alone, everyone can live happily. When they persist through the challenges he provides, they will gain the courage and strength to get past anything. He is the boy in Omelas, he is the scapegoat, the sole sacrifice necessary for **hope** to foster and grow and become a beaming beacon of light.

Which is why he doesn't understand.

Even as he paints a target on himself and asks them to kill him, why do the Ultimate Talents continue to kill each other? It's such a waste...

With every new execution, Komaeda laughs and cries and obsesses over what he could have done better, what went wrong. He's so worthless, so absolutely, utterly worthless... he couldn't even play his role well.

That's not even the worst part.

Even when they solve each class trial, the looks on their faces, the heavy eyebags, the slouched shoulders...

Komaeda senses the growing **despair** in his friends.

Why? It should be **hope** that's sprouting in their hearts, so why?

He wants to do something. Anything, to help them. Even if that means risking his life for everyone's sake... If the people he loves, who are the symbols of **hope**, are able to use a worthless person like him to shine even brighter... it'll be the greatest honour of his life to sacrifice himself for such a worthy cause.

So he picks up the gun in the Final Dead Room, loads five bullets and holds the cold steel against his forehead.

Although it's not much, he too, has an Ultimate-level talent. If he can't survive a game of roulette with one-sixth of a chance, if his *luck*, if his *one defining trait*

can't overcome this, then he can't be called the Ultimate Lucky Student. If so, he *deserves* to die.

Komaeda pulls the trigger.

Click.

"Haha...!" Komaeda laughs lightly as he wins. From Monokuma, he gains the prize — student profiles from their supposed time at Hope's Peak Academy. He holds it with reverence, unable to calm the excitement thrumming through his veins.

Someone like him... someone like him would finally be useful! Perhaps he would finally be praised and appreciated. Perhaps... perhaps the other Ultimates would think that he deserves to be an Ultimate alongside them. How happy would they be, if he brings them such valuable information? He could already imagine their smiling faces, and it brings a smile to his own.

Cautiously, he opens the file with great care, reading every single letter with great detail.

...

His smile falls.

Why?

How could this be?

Komaeda was prepared to become a sacrifice for the rest of the Ultimates, who were the beacons of **hope**. He was prepared to die for the sake of true **hope**.

And yet...

It's **disgusting.**

***He's* disgusting.**

What kind of shitty luck cycle is this? Being *extremely lucky* to survive on a one-sixth chance. Then being *extremely unlucky* to actually live to find out that everyone he loves and admires, that *he* himself is a harbinger of **despair**... To have his **hopes** and dreams shatter, to have his entire world collapse in itself after coming so far...

With desperate hands, Komaeda rips the tear-blotched pages from the files, as though it would erase the truth. He rips them, scrunches them up, *shrieks* and

stomps on it all and **despairs**. He collapses on the ground when he's utterly spent, limbs shaking with exhaustion and emotion.

This can't be happening.

This... this won't do. He has to do something.

Hope has to win. It must.

That's when the idea strikes him.

If he went through maximum suffering, then surely, *surely* the maximum good luck will follow. The thing he yearns for the most... wouldn't it come true then? His useless talent... couldn't it bring forth **true hope**?

It was genius..!

The resolve fuels him on.

In the Monokuma plushie factory, Komaeda prepares the fire grenades, arranges the Monokuma panels and the oil lighter, then slings the cord over the ceiling girder. Using that as a support, he hoists the spear above him. He ties his arms and legs, leaving his right arm free.

Laying down face-up, he smiles at the sight of the dangling spear above him.

It'll work... This will definitely work!

Suppressing his delirious laughter, Komaeda covers his twisted lips with duct tape.

His grip tightens on the cord as he slashes the knife across his left thigh. Warm blood splatters against his hand.

"Mmph...!"

His leg jerks and he grunts in pain, but he doesn't scream out loud, not with the duct tape over his mouth. His pupils shake in their sockets as the pain overwhelms him.

It *hurts*.

It hurts so fucking bad.

The pain feels just like the heartache he felt when he discovered the truth. His hand trembles, and his chest heaves, but it's too late to back out now. Gritting his teeth, he slashes the knife in rapid succession so he doesn't chicken out.

For a moment, he's unable to do anything but writhe in pain. Wheezing, lightheaded, and disoriented, Komaeda blinks back the tears stinging his eyes. He has to push through. He's so, so close. All the suffering would be worth it in the end.

Propping up the knife on the Monokuma plushie next to him, he slams his hand onto the blade.

"Ghk!"

Now, he just has to wait for the Ultimates to arrive, kicking off a chain reaction that would start a fire and cause them to throw the fire grenades. With his luck cycle, with his t*alent*, the traitor would be the one to throw the fire grenade he tampered with. When he breathes in Monokuma's special poison, he will let go and the spear will fall upon him. He'll create the perfect murder, trap the *Remnants of Despair*, and rescue the traitor among them. The traitor will live on and carry on Komaeda's **hope**.

It's going to be okay now.

He's not going to lose to despair.

Through his sacrifice, he'll defeat the **Ultimate Despair** and create the most powerful **hope** that can overcome the greatest of all **despair**, so that **hope** will never lose to **despair** again.

Komaeda smiles as he waits to die for the **Ultimate Hope**.

LOTTO
SMILE AT HOPE
IN THE NAME OF DISPAIR

UNPREDICTABILITY

Hadrian

His name was Izuru Kamukura.

In the history he had learned, that name belonged to a very important man—the founder of Hope's Peak Academy. Izuru Kamukura had strived not for conformity, but for perseverance and talent. The man had seen a future within the confines of his legacy, and a hope within the students that studied there.

History was swayed by the mortal eye, however. It was mangled and shredded and rewritten through so many eyes that another's intentions bled out the originator's. The truth was subjective and the future was a false reality.

He understood this fact with perfect clarity. History was dead, and yet present through his eyes. Hope's Peak had not followed a path of virtue. His existence was proof, built from the collective will of desperate people. His own history had been stripped away and given new life without purpose.

"You are Izuru Kamukura. You are our hope."

He had no name.

He was not Izuru Kamukura. He held no relation and no debt to a man long dead. Despite what the doctors and trainers repeated in the same desperate tone, he did not hold their hope within his being. Maybe once, but no longer.

One without will or emotion could never find the world lacking, after all. He saw nothing to lead them towards. No direction that would satisfy a hope full of lies.

Nonetheless, contrary to faith and history, his name was Izuru Kamukura. He was not born, but created.

And the heart of man did not beat within his chest.

The woman's name was Junko Enoshima.

Unpredictable was a word Izuru had learned, but not one he understood. If he could calculate the speed at which a stone fell to the earth and the direction it would bounce, then the world could not truly create unpredictability. The human mind simply perceived ignorance as such and created a false sense of wonder as their uneducated expectations were proved incorrect. There was no room in his mind for that which could not be predetermined, because the notion did not exist.

And yet, despite scattering dictionaries about his feet, he could not find a word that better fit her being.

Any person could become a slave to human vice and impulse. It was simply in their nature to subject themselves to need, but she was beyond simple imprisonment. It was as if the roles of control were switched—she had so thoroughly embraced human depravity that it now crept from her fingertips and infected everything around her. All she touched became destructive, all she spoke became a catalyst to torture of the basest of human experience. She entranced the world with an all-encompassing emotion that Izuru had never cared to understand.

Despair.

Her eyes consumed the very core of his being. She visited him, followed by the stench of blood, and asked, "Wanna see what I have to offer?"

Unpredictability, he discovered, was a possibility she could create. If only because he could not predict if she was capable of making him feel. Emotion was abstract and unknowable to him. A simple conclusion that came with understanding the material world.

This woman was not someone he could understand, and thus, not a being he could predict.

Junko Enoshima made her offer, and Izuru Kamukura wondered what despair was like.

He wondered, and true to Junko's words, he watched a woman die.

She was young, and her eyes said that reality was incapable of touching her. That the wounds on her body, the pain that terrified her, the blood escaping her would not kill her. A simple calculation told him that it would. Her time was limited. Her life was over.

She still foolishly struggled. She decided against probability that she had a chance of survival, and she called him by a name.

“Hajime?”

That was not his name.

He knew his truth, however, and that she had known who he had been before was of no real consequence. It was her similarity that gave him pause—if Junko Enoshima was Despair, then this girl had the capability of becoming her opposite.

She, also, had the unpredictability to make him feel.

Chiaki Nanami died, and Izuru Kamukura wondered what hope was like.

He did not know if there would ever be another like her. He could feel the chance to understand slip through his fingers and leave him with—he didn’t quite understand. He could not feel, and he could never understand. She was supposed to leave him, and he was supposed to feel, but everything within him remained the same.

He had never enjoyed games. The pin she used to hold her hair back, themed to match her status as the Ultimate Gamer, remained in his pocket.

Perhaps, if this life were a game... he would want to see which would accomplish it first. Which side would be the first to allow him emotions.

Which would be the first to let him understand the reason tears streamed down his face when Chiaki Nanami breathed her last?

Junko Enoshima cared not if he wandered from the devastation she wreaked upon the foundation of foolish dreams. If this game were to properly take place, he would need another. A candidate to oppose her. Perhaps her plans would yield such a person, or perhaps he would find them first. Either way, he would need Hope *and* Despair.

“*Your name is Izuru Kamukura. You are our Hope.*”

He had no name, and he would not inherit the future, but for the first time since his creation, Izuru Kamukura understood *want*.

Makoto Naegi and Junko Enoshima were fundamentally different.

Having seen and experienced them both, Izuru understood something many never would. Those driven by Hope and Despair were tenacious. Driven and determined, twisting others to their own ends with the power in their hands, and unyielding. Death did not stop either as they engraved their names into a twice biased history and fought with their entire being.

Junko Enoshima lived. Not in the flesh, but undoubtedly the same. Makoto Naegi planned. Not in understanding, but in the instinctual understanding that their two forces would meet and one would prevail.

Izuru Kamukura closed his eyes. His mind fell away.

When he awoke, would it be to Hope or Despair? Either way, he was sure to finally understand.

SHING!

DEADGHOULS

I'LL BE GOD, TODAY

Topher

The first time Angie realizes she's loved, she is four years old and filled with want.

It's not love in the typical sense, not love from a father or mother or sibling, not the love that comes from the gentle warmth of a home; Angie isn't raised by one set of parents anyways. She gets passed around from home to home and family to family like a novelty hand-me-down.

No, Angie only understands love in the biblical sense, hellfire and "be not afraid" and all. The promise of reward after a job well done and punishment after misstep.

Angie knows she is loved when her people come clambering towards her, begging for a hug, for a prophecy. Angie knows she is loved by the sight of their smiles when she gives them exactly what they ask for.

Behind her, God grins, and Angie asks for everything she wants; paint, clothing, hellfire and all.

Prayer, of course, comes along with her position as her island's prophet. She prays as she wakes up in the morning, prays before meals, prays when a child stubs their toe, when the harvest is good, when the harvest is bad, when someone is ill and dying and when someone is giving birth.

The presence of God is like a weight upon Angie's shoulders, and Angie kneels, hands clasped together with a paintbrush tucked behind her ear. She likes to imagine herself as Atlas, the people on her island cheering for her strength, her ability to deliver exactly what they need. She tries to imagine what they see when they look at her, if they picture God's hands on her shoulders, His smile at her decrees.

She sends them out of the room whenever she paints.

Angie Yonaga is a blank canvas, and with each brushstroke, each caress of paint, she embodies something new. It's a physically taxing activity, of course, the strain of making art, of learning, of projecting what she needs to onto canvas or marble or wax; that's why she doesn't like to be seen during her process. Not because God's whispers can sometimes be so, so quiet.

And when she's done, when she finally presents her finished masterpieces, her people listen to what she says happily. They imagine God in her work and thus, He is there, and she gets what she wants- what God wants.

Even when she asks for blood.

Angie will not be allowed to ask for blood here.

She listens idly and with a smile on her face at the bickering before her; Kokichi's too-large words and Kaito's exaggerated offense, Kaede's attempts at resolutions, Tenko's threats. It's all so... wonderful. So exotic.

"Angie thinks everyone needs to keep their voice down! It is so hard to hear God with all this yelling, but He says He is willing to offer 300 points to any loyal listeners!" Angie claps her hands together, head swaying back and forth, back and forth.

Her words are worth less than a drop of water in a pond.

All she gets in response is Kaito shooting her an exasperated look. "You're really out of your fucking mind, aren't you?"

Angie's smile doesn't falter. Hidden by her loose jacket, her shoulder blades twitch.

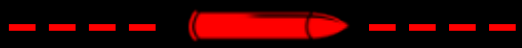
"Kaede," she says instead, turning to the girl across the table, "Angie is just so disappointed everyone is not getting along!" A smile, another swish of her head. "Aren't you?" she prompts.

Kaede gives a slight frown, still doing her best to appear friendly and approving of everyone. "Of course I am!" she says, giving Kaito a light slap on the shoulder as he yelps. "Momota-kun, don't be rude!"

"Yeah!" Tenko pipes up, "These degenerates are ruining things for everyone!"

More arguing commences, but Angie feels no need to contribute.

It may be harder to make these people listen than she is used to, but Angie is positive she can find a way around that.



As it turns out, it's even easier to get her friends to listen to her than Angie had initially thought.

Gonta wants there to be peace, and he's willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen. Kiibo wants order, Tsumugi wants a place to belong, Himiko wants life to be simple. And Tenko... Tenko wants Himiko. Angie can work with that.

There are those that aren't so agreeable, of course. Shuichi would have been easily won over without Kaito's presence, Miu could have been cajoled with a bit more work, a bit more force, and perhaps even Kaito could have been persuaded with time and more proof of the fact that Angie only wanted to stop the killing game.

But it doesn't matter; the Student Council should be enough. Enough of a majority to keep people compliant, to try to wrestle back some feeling of control from this spiralling situation. God is so quiet in these walls, His voice only echoing through Angie in dreams and whenever she holds another in her arms. He is quiet and blood spatters so loudly against the ground here, no longer a sacrifice, no longer something holy. Life itself has been reduced to mere amusement, to... inconvenience. Like roadkill. Her newfound friends smile at her, looking towards her for guidance, their skin not yet stained red.

With her lab available, Angie spends hours painting, creating, ears strained heavenwards.

It has to be enough.

And at the end of it all, what Angie wants most is peace.

It's what she wants, what God wants, what those that matter to her most here want. She sees it in the council's eyes, in Kokichi's too-sharp grin, in Shuichi's desperate detective work. She sees it in the bend of Kaede's neck, in Kirumi's fierce pace.

The flashback light shatters with a satisfying crash.

She doesn't understand how they don't see it, how they don't see the change that occurs anytime memories are recovered. It's a corruption. A slow rot. Nothing good ever comes from it.

Everyone is still upset over it, of course, but Angie's shoulder blades cramp, and God sings through her dreams, the voices of the dead joining in a melancholy choir. She's so close to getting what she wants; she's so close to giving it to everyone.

Soon enough, they'll listen. They'll see the broad strokes on her canvas, the curve of each wax figure, for what they are; a message, a prophecy, a lifeline.

Bringing Rantaro back, with his steady presence and calming words, will only help. Blood pounds in Angie's ears when the Necronomicon is revealed, when the possibility of life after death is dangled in front of them like a carrot on a stick, and Angie thinks it must be God asking her to do this. He's telling her He can make this happen. He must be.

The ritual is prepared, and Angie's hands shake in a way they haven't since the first time she bloodletted in front of a crowd.

Peace will be wrought, no matter the method. Hellfire and all.

It's a candle that does it.

A 2 am urge, a whim, a whisper in the back of her head telling her she should do this now.

And Angie listens to impulse, as she always has.

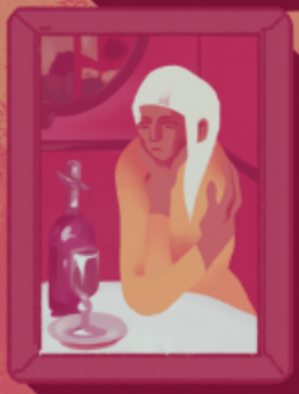
It's a candle that does it, a candle that brings her feet unknowingly to Korekiyo's crime scene, her attempts at peace, at control, crumbling down beneath the force of a single wooden plank. The anthropologist is stronger than he seems, and quiet, so quiet; Angie knows, in that split second between the sound of the board whooshing down towards her and the moment of impact, that he's done this before. That his hands are covered in rot and viscera.

In that single moment, Angie thinks back on punishment, and reward. She wonders which this is, and feels the conflict resonate within her. She doesn't know whether to be upset with her death, the interruption of her grand plans for

the future, or... content. Relieved to finally be free of the unrelenting violence of this life.

As Korekiyo gathers her into his arms and begins his mad dash to cover up the evidence of his blunder, Angie can only hope God is about to take the baton from the anthropologist and bundle her back into His loving embrace. She dreams, unconscious and bleeding and hovering halfway between this world and the next, God's song getting ever so louder, and finds herself glad that Korekiyo ultimately brings her body back to her lab.

What a gift it is, to die amongst one's creations.



This world is mine
Kokichi Ouma

RECIPROCITY FAILURE

EvilMuffins

Kokichi lightly tapped his knuckles against the door. As expected, it opened immediately, leading him to wonder what would have happened if he had just stood there silently instead. Somehow, he thought that Kirumi would still have answered anyway.

“Yes?” Kirumi asked, peering out of her lab. “May I help you?”

If he hadn’t gotten to know Kirumi better earlier in the day, Kokichi might have thought that her response was automatic, something programmed into her by some master she had served. But just like everyone else trapped inside of the school, there was more to Kirumi than that.

Kokichi burst into tears. “Waaah!! I was trying to make myself a snack in the kitchen but the oven caught on fire!”

Kirumi cocked a brow, hands clasped dutifully in front of her. “Is it *currently* on fire?”

“I don’t know. Maybe?” Kokichi replied brightly, tears having completely ceased. “Would you mind checking on it for me?”

“Of course.” Kirumi nodded politely.

As the two embarked together on their way to the kitchen, Kokichi couldn’t help but notice that Kirumi’s steps were perfectly in sync with his, despite her longer legs. All the while, however, she managed to stay exactly two steps behind him.

Kokichi had watched the motive videos—every last one of them—and he couldn’t help but find himself intrigued by Kirumi’s in particular. How was it that someone so keen on following others could also serve as the acting leader for the entire country?

“I had a blast playing tag together last night!” Kokichi piped up as they

traveled down the staircase, as it became abundantly clear that Kirumi didn't intend to strike up any conversation of her own.

"I'm glad to hear that," Kirumi replied curtly, "Although it does perturb me that I never did discover just what you were scheming out there on the lawn."

"My dear Toujou-chan!" Kokichi hopped down the final two steps backward. "That would be because you're not the Super High School Level Detective! Isn't it just cool beans how every one of us has such a unique talent?"

"Quite," Kirumi replied, expression inscrutable, although it was clear she knew that Kokichi was leading the conversation somewhere that she may prefer it not go. He could see it in her eyes.

"But somehow, there seems to be almost nothing that the Super High School Level Maid can't do! Why, it's almost as if you have every conceivable talent wrapped up into one neat little bundle! How nifty is that?"

Kirumi placed her hand gingerly on the kitchen door handle as though testing to see if it were hot. "I must admit that it does suit my needs. It would surely be more difficult to serve others efficiently had I a different talent."

Once she opened the door, the two were greeted by a billowing cloud of dark smoke.

"So you weren't lying after all," Kirumi coughed into her glove as she strode into the disaster zone that had once been the school's kitchen.

Pulling his bandana up over his nose and mouth, Kokichi followed. The smoke brought real tears to his eyes. "Hey now. Would I lie about something so serious?"

"In a word," Kirumi said, rummaging calmly through the cabinet underneath the sink despite the encroaching flames, "Yes."

Emerging triumphant, Kirumi brandished a fire extinguisher, smothering the blaze with a spray of white foam until it was fully put out.

She showed considerable restraint, Kokichi thought appreciatively. Someone like Maki may have turned the nozzle on him next. He let out a whistle.

"That was impressive!" Kokichi clapped his hands together appreciatively. "The entire school might have burnt down if you weren't here to help! I guess that's one way to end a killing game, though. I wonder if that would have meant that I won? If everyone was unable to escape, I mean, myself included."

“I would suppose so,” Kirumi replied, peering inside of the oven to assess the damage. She turned to glance at Kokichi over her shoulder. “Of course such a situation would be purely hypothetical.”

“Oh?” Kokichi blinked owlishly.

“Because,” Kirumi continued, frowning as she pulled a burnt oven-mitt out of the wreckage that had once been the oven. “I simply would not allow that to happen. My duty as a maid would not permit it. Even at the cost of my own life, I would find a way to save all of you. That said, I would prefer if you didn’t try anything.”

Kokichi grinned, bouncing up on the balls of his feet and plucking the charred piece of cloth from Kirumi’s hand. “So that’s where it went! You would not believe how easy it is to lose a glove around here.”

“I’m sure,” Kirumi replied dryly. “Now, if my work here is done, I shall be taking my leave.”

“No, don’t go!” Kokichi pleaded, dropping to his knees, palms clapped together in front of his face. “I would be oh so very lonely if you were to leave me here, all alone with my guilt over wrecking the kitchen!”

For a brief moment, Kirumi’s nose wrinkled before she regained her composure. “I would prefer if you didn’t lie to me.”

Kokichi cocked his head to one side. “I do enjoy your company, Toujou-chan. That’s the truth.”

There was a pause, Kirumi appraising him with an austerity almost at odds with the typical expectations at play when it came to a person who supposedly took joy in the serving of others.

“I’ll choose to believe that,” she told him, finally, folding her hands in front of her apron. The back of Kokichi’s neck prickled. “Now, will you be needing anything else?”

As if deep in thought, Kokichi pressed a forefinger to his temple. “Well actually, yes, now that you mention it! I dropped something earlier.”

“‘*Dropped something*’ where?”

Kokichi watched as Kirumi stared silently into the clear water, all the way to the bottom of the useless swimming pool.

“Is there a problem?” he cooed, pacing the pool’s perimeter, the sound of his shoes resounding on the tile. “You did tell me that you could accomplish anything we ask, didn’t you?”

Surely, retrieving his spare bandana from the depths of the pool should have been a piece of cake for someone of her talents.

No one was truly all-powerful.

There could have been thousands of Super High School Level students rounded up and trapped together like lab rats, and not a single one of them would have come in sporting the talent of utter omnipotence.

Not even Kokichi Ouma.

If he were to simply order Kirumi not to go through with her plans for murder, would she obey?

The finer details of her plot remained unknown to Kokichi, of course. He wasn’t Angie’s god, omniscient and ineffectual. Yet the fact remained that Kirumi Toujou was most likely plotting a murder. Too much to lose and too much skill not to try, it was a dangerous combination, and one that Kokichi understood far too well. If given the chance to save the remaining students at the expense of one, or even a few, would he take it? If his family of DICE members back home were in danger, would he sacrifice his fellow students in their stead?

Kirumi turned back to the pool and if Kokichi were someone else, he could have pushed her in. Quietly, she conceded.

“I’m afraid that I’m not able to reach it.”

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

Golden-redhead

She's been demoted.

She should have expected that. She knows better than anyone that Danganronpa's masterminds aren't lucky enough to hold that position for too long, usually no longer than a season or two. And yet, for some inexplicable reason, she still had that fragile, fickle hope that she would be different, that she would avoid that fate.

The disappointment stings. The insults she wishes she could throw at Danganronpa's representative, sitting in front of her with that practiced plastic smile, burn in her throat and rest at the very edge of her tongue and oh, she would give so much to just let them out, releasing all this pent up frustration.

She knows better, though.

So she hides her hands, clenched into tight fists in the folds of her skirt, and responds with a smile just as plastic. Thanking them for this opportunity and expressing hopes of future collaborations that she knows will not come.

She might be a fan, but she has no delusions about the way Team Danganronpa functions as a company, preying on young people and their dreams of fame and glory.

They can't fire her, not really. She's seen too much and knows too many dirty little secrets that they could sue her ass for if she were to release them to the general public. And so they keep her close, rubbing salt into the wound, as they lead her to her new office, a single desk and a flickering lamp, and it stings. It stings so bad, blood boiling in her veins even as the smile remains stubbornly plastered on her face.

She might be loyal to this company, but that doesn't mean they ever intended to be loyal in return.

She fought tooth and nail for this position, made sacrifice after sacrifice to be here. Dignity has always seemed like a small price to pay.

Her perfect creations have turned their backs on her. But that's okay. That's fine.

It's not like she expected anything else.

Outside this game, they are all useless. This game was designed just for them, meant to highlight their best sides, all these little things she'd spent countless nights perfecting; every quirk and flaw, every little element that, once joined with the rest, would make them who they are.

Ouma was nothing without her, that glint in his eye that she's spent so many hours perfecting now dull and nearly gone as he smiles too wide and laughs too loud, clinging to the role she wrote for him and stumbling around without the script.

They are empty shells of who they used to be, her perfect little creations meant to shine bright and bleed bright pink all over the empty hallways of the academy, now reduced to forced smiles and pointless therapy sessions that she joins out of obligation and leaves long before the time is up, frustration itching under her skin.

She's always disagreed with the decision to keep the contestants alive and she misses the good old times of when 'for the death' meant 'for the death'.

It was an honor to die as one of Danganronpa's characters. A privilege.

Once free from the stimulation, they simply lacked purpose. Memories of their previous lives long gone, most of them couldn't realize how blessed they were to be chosen to be a part of something greater than any of them. Trauma, the psychologists call it, making Shirogane scoff and look away, her lips pursed in a pout.

Shirogane sees the way they look at her. Saihara's stare bores into her skin, full of cold, unvoiced disgust that looks so wrong and out of character on his delicate features. She wishes she could smooth the angry lines of his furrowed brows. His eyes trail after her as she heads to take her seat at the edge of the group, eyes set on some point above their heads and clutching the material of her long skirt tight enough for her knuckles to whiten.

She listens, but never speaks up herself. She lets the cold fury course through her veins as they keep blaming the very game she helped to create. They refuse to accept the choice they'd made the moment she nudged the documents in their direction and put the pen in their hands, watching with barely contained glee as

they signed away their rights to the life they led before and let her rewrite their fate.

There's many things to be said about Team Danganronpa's methods of recruitment, ways to lure people into participating in their little game, but coercion is not one of them.

It was their choice to make. They are simply too foolish, too single-minded, to realize that it's been the best decision they could have ever made.

Shirogane knows patience better than most people. She also knows how to tell that hers is growing thin.

As soon as the therapy is over, cut short by Iruma openly hyperventilating in her chair and Ouma's antics, she lifts herself off her seat with as much grace as she can manage and heads towards the exit, not looking back.

"Shirogane-san!" A familiar voice calls after her when she's nearing the exit and she stops abruptly, surprised.

Shirogane turns.

Akamatsu's smile is wide and deceivingly sincere, even if it doesn't match the darkening bruises underneath her eyes or the matted, unwashed hair falling in long strands on her shoulders. Despite that, there's some kind of tired dignity in the way she carries herself and something in Shirogane's chest aches as she looks at her fallen protagonist, her biggest disappointment.

"I'm afraid I don't have time," she says curtly, forcing a pleasant smile that she's practiced to perfection.

"I insist," Akamatsu says easily and reaches for her arm. Shirogane lets her fingers wrap around her forearm, stunned by her sudden boldness, so very in character.

Wordlessly, she lets Akamatsu lead her towards the cafeteria.

Akamatsu's expectant eyes follow her as she moves to sit across from her, eyes wide and staring at her with some kind of focused urgency.

Shirogane clears her throat.

"What is it? Like I said, I don't have much time. I'm a busy woman."

Akamatsu crosses her arms over her chest. "Why?"

Shirogane blinks. Once. Twice. She forces a smile, the corners of her lips straining. “I don’t think I understand the question.”

“Why me?” Akamatsu explains impatiently. “Why did you choose *me* to be the protagonist?”

Shirogane blinks at her, not quite sure what she’s getting at.

“Well, why not?” She asks simply.

Akamatsu’s expression hardens. “Stop deflecting. I want to know. I think I deserve to know.”

“It’s nothing personal, Akamatsu-san,” Shirogane shrugs, folding her arms behind her back, head tilted to the side. “I was simply… inspired.”

“Inspired,” Akamatsu repeats in a flat tone, eyes fixed on Shirogane’s face as if looking for answers she’s unwilling to give her. “What does that even mean, inspired?”

Shirogane chuckles. “Let’s just say that I’ve always had a special interest in, ah, morally grey characters,” she explains easily. “And especially the morally grey protagonists.”

“I wanted a female protagonist, plain and simple. A girl that would face someone like Junko Enoshima unflinchingly. A girl determined to make things right. Although…” Shirogane trails off, a frown on her face as she lifts her head and her eyes meet Akamatsu’s. “I have to admit, I didn’t expect you to go off the rails that quickly.”

“And whose fault is that,” Akamatsu says, spitting the words out like poison.

Shirogane sighs.

“You’re right, I suppose,” she admits, head down and eyes far away. “I wanted to give you all that little bit of free will. Just to surprise me, you see.”

She lifts her head, a bitter smile on her lips. “And surprise me you did.”

Akamatsu scoffs, tired face twisting in an ugly grimace.

“Don’t expect me to feel sorry for you.”

“I don’t,” Shirogane responds with a half-shrug. “It was a risk and I took it. I simply regret losing my chance.”

She sounds almost wistful, words growing more and more quiet. She finds

herself admiring the gentle curves of Akamatsu's face, once so bright and full of life and now ashen, all sunken cheeks and dull eyes.

I made her beautiful, thinks Shirogane with a pang of longing, fingers twitching at her side uselessly, as if to reach out.

She took that boring, ordinary girl and turned her into something iconic, turned her into a symbol of something bigger than themselves. Akamatsu may not understand it, but there's a version of her who once sat with hope in her eyes, sorting through Shirogane's notes, helping her create the Akamatsu millions of people came to know and love.

No matter what she says, no matter what she thinks, no matter how much she might disagree with it now, Shirogane turned her into the best version of herself.

Shirogane licks her lips, empty laugh bubbling in her chest, threatening to escape.

How dare she question her when all she did was help? How dare she stand before her now like it's some kind of interrogation when she should be thanking her? Should see just how unforgettable she's made her?

This version of Akamatsu, the one she wrote into reality, she'll outlive both of them.

"You are free to think whatever you want," Shirogane informs Akamatsu coldly when the silence stretches between them for a little too long, voice laced with pity she can't quite push back. "But whether you remember or not, we all made our choices, every single one of us. You cannot blame me for your own decisions, Akamatsu-san. You *wanted* to be a protagonist. The kind of protagonist who dies. The kind of protagonist who will be remembered. I simply made it possible."

It's almost comical, the way the emotions flash across Akamatsu's face, disgust shifting into anguish, then shame and then, finally, fading into defiant anger, hands clenching uselessly at her sides.

In the end, Shirogane can't help but pity her.

That Akamatsu who's standing there in front of her is merely a ghost of the Ultimate Pianist; too dull and too ordinary to be anything other than a broken girl who is looking to put blame on anyone other than herself. It's depressing, really, and some part of Shirogane longs for the times when the games were more than just a simulation, the times when the characters couldn't come back to life and ruin the illusion Team Danganronpa worked so hard to create.

Yet another proof that fiction is better than reality could ever hope to be.

But then... Why can she see the same pity reflected in Akamatsu's eyes?

Somewhere along the line, Akamatsu's face morphs into something gentler, something not as angry, eyes now bright with some kind of newfound understanding, and Shirogane feels like she missed something while lost in thought, some important piece of information.

"I feel sorry for you," Akamatsu says finally, almost sadly, but with a note of finality in her voice. Then she spins around and without another glance her way, she marches out of the cafeteria and into the hallway and then disappears around the corner.

Stunned, Shirogane stares after her, a slight frown on her face.

She isn't quite sure what to make of Akamatsu's parting words. Her first instinct to simply scoff at how ridiculous it sounds. She might be bitter over Team Danganronpa's current treatment. She might wish she'd done certain things differently, but there's no reason for anyone to feel sorry for her, least of all Akamatsu.

After all, she got her dream. She turned fiction into reality. The game she created here will entertain people for decades to come.

And yet, she can't help but feel uneasy, staring after Akamatsu long after she's gone, her words replaying in her head, over and over again even as she forces herself to head back to her little office and get back to work.

ARTISTS

ALLISON
bloodyusher

BUGBEARSKETCHES
Bugbearsketches

CELCHUNO
celchuno
celchuno

CELE
310v3
310v3

CHIBIGAIA
chibigaia-art
chibigaia

CHRONIKO
chronononiko
chronononiko

CONTRA-ENTRY
contra_entry
contra.entry

CORIN
cornsketches
cornsketches

COSMICAPPROACH
cosmicApproach
cosmicapproach

DEADGHOULS
_deadghouls
dead_ghouls

DONUTOUS
Donutous
Donutous

EMLINART
EMLIN_ART
emlinart

ARTISTS

GOUBOOT
gouboot
gouboot

IBBLESCRIBBLES
ibblescribbles
ibblescribbles

KARUKUMORI
8komori
karukumori

LINGUA DI GATTO
LinguaDiGattoo
linguadigatto0

MINTYSAMMY
Pumiyo1
Mintysammy

MISS ARILICIOUS
Miss_Arilicious
missarilicious

NENA
nenanugget
nena.nugget

OBSESSEDFISH
Fishmum
ObsessedFish

PEACHLONK
peachlonk
liriennn

PHANTOMORROW
phantomorrow
phantomorrow

POOF
poofmalyakaet

RAM
computerram
_computerram

ARTISTS

RYA_AUTO

rya_auto

rya_auto

SABIMILIA

sabimilia

SOCKFINCH

sockfinch

sockfinch

SORRELARTZ

sorrelartz

sorrelartz

SPOOKIE

ssgprt

ssgprt

TERURI

teruriii_

teruriii_

YUN0036

yun0036_

yun_0036

WRITERS

BLOODLINE - *Red*

mystxmomo mystxmomo

CELESTIAL - *Saa*

yitsuin

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR - *Golden-redhead*

golden_redhead golden-redhead

DESPAIRING FOR HOPE - *Sugamint*

Drowninginworkbutstill shigahands

I'LL BE GOD, TODAY - *Topher*

ktfics ktophers

RECIPROCITY FAILURE - *EvilMuffins*

evil-muffins mikan_komaeda

UNPREDICTABILITY - *Hadrian*

hadrian_pendragon hadrian_pen

MERCH ARTISTS

ARYLL
aryllins
aryllins

BABIROUSA
babirousa
babirousa

MINTY
merrymint
merryminnt

NETWORKINK
networkink_
networkink_

RHEMY
rhemydraw

SQUISH
snowharasho
squisharasho

WILDDAGGERS
wilddaggers
wilddaggers

MODERATORS

HEAD MOD

USAMINII

Usaminii

Usaminii

CO-HEAD MOD

EMPERORNIBS

Emperornibs

Emperornibs

ART MOD

SAVETHEBEES2K16

pbpanicbutton

savethebees2k16

FORMATTING MOD

TATE

yuuenmi_

yuuenmi_

WRITING MOD

NOOTY

NootsMyGunAtYou

HereComesAComment

WRITING MOD

SUZU

Suzu-kun22

GRAPHICS MOD

IMAJENINK

imajenink

imajenink

FINANCE MOD

ASTERIA

OuraniaAstraea

OuraniaAstraea

THANK YOU!

Thank you so much for supporting **Rebuttal Showdown**, A Danganronpa Antagonist Zine!

It has been our pleasure working over the last several months to produce a project that means so much to us, so we hope that you enjoy it as much as we do. We are beyond grateful for everyone's outstanding support and we couldn't have done it without you.

On behalf of our team, thank you!

@AntagZine

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